

Communication Skills and General Knowledge: Helping your Child with School Readiness

School readiness is the term often used to describe a child's ability to meet the tasks of the school setting. Several areas of development have an impact on how a child will do at school. Five main areas of developmental readiness are Physical Health and Well-being, Social Competence, Emotional Maturity, Language and Cognitive Development, and Communication Skills and General Knowledge.

According to research done by the Understanding the Early Years Project, in Red Deer, the area in which the most children are not ready for school is in the area of communication skills and general knowledge.

Children who start school ready to learn are more likely to continue to thrive. Many studies have shown that children who do well in kindergarten, continue to succeed in the early grades and are more likely to complete high school. They also have better long term outcomes in the areas of health and career success.

In this column, let's look at the developmental domain or area of "Communication Skills and General Knowledge", and how a parent can encourage readiness in this area.

This area of readiness includes: **Being able to communicate easily and effectively.** Children should be able to talk by age two and be understood by age three. A parent can encourage speech development in many ways, but in general, talk, talk and more talk. The more words an infant or child hears, the better. But TV or recorded speech does not have the same effect as interactive conversation, with eye contact and gestures. With babies, parents can repeat and exaggerate words, talk face to face, and use simple sentences. With preschoolers, introduce new words for simpler ones, try to use comments and open ended questions in conversation, rather than yes-no questions, add new words and expand on what the child says. Try counting to 10 while waiting for your child to respond-he or she may be thinking about what to say and needs more time than an older child or adult. The following pages from Alberta Health Services website have tips for encouraging speech development in babies and preschoolers and a DVD.

<http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/speechlanguage/preschool.htm>

http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/speechlanguage/pdf/listening_and_talking.pdf

Participating in story-telling and imaginative play: To encourage this skill, parents can talk to young children about daily routines and events, remember past experiences ". . . remember when we.." or can ask their child to tell someone else what happened, or to describe a movie or book. Puppets, dress up clothes, dolls, household tools and blocks all help to encourage i

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Has clear articulation for most sounds: By age 3, a child's speech should be at least 75% (easily understood) by parents and by age 4, his or her speech should be 100% understandable to strangers. A child may still make errors, but teachers, other adults, and friends should be able to understand his speech. If parents are concerned about their preschooler's speech, help is available. Parents can call their local health care provider, or their community health clinic.

Shows adequate general knowledge: Parents who are engaged in activities with their children can help them learn about the world. Go for walks, draw pictures together, check the weather, talk about events, read books about nature, animals, occupations, not just fairy tales or fantasy stories.

Visit museums, libraries, parks, and talk about what you are seeing. Monitor TV watching for quality, content and the amount of time your child spends viewing. Provide opportunities for your child to participate in group learning activities-check the city of Red Deer Community Services and Program Guide. Check www.reddeer.ca.

With the interest and support of parents, children will be able to enjoy and benefit from the many opportunities offered in the school setting.

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